

**BAKERSFIELD, CA-** Today, Congressman Jim Costa (D-Bakersfield) announced that a total of \$360,000 has been awarded to Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance, Inc. to strengthen civil and criminal legal assistance programs for adult and youth victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking who are seeking relief in legal matters as a result of that abuse or violence. Funding was released by the United States Department of Justice through the Legal Assistance for Victims Grant Program.

“Domestic violence does not know city, county, state or congressional boundaries,” Costa said. “As co-chairman and co-founder of the Congressional Victims’ Rights Caucus, I know that crime victims need assistance after a violent crime. These are vital funds for the Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance, Inc. and for crime victims who need their services.”

Incorporated in 1968, Greater Bakersfield Legal Assistance provides free comprehensive legal assistance and representation services to indigent residents of Kern County. With this initial grant, GBLA, in collaboration with the Alliance Against Family Violence and Sexual Assault, the Women’s Center, and Alpha House, will establish a “Domestic Violence Unit.” This Domestic Violence Unit will be staffed by one full-time attorney, one full-time bilingual paralegal, and three case managers who will provide civil legal and support services to at least 225 battered women during the course of the grant.

The Legal Assistance for Victims Grant (LAV) Program began as a set aside from the STOP Violence Against Women Formula Grants Program and was statutorily created in the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act of 2000. The Office of Violence Against Women funds projects that provide comprehensive legal services either through direct representation and/or victim advocacy which enhances victims’ safety and strengthens their economic security.